



## **Refugee Digest 74**

**March 2023**

### **Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons**

The Department of Home Affairs has acknowledged that there is an increase in the backlog of visa applications waiting to be processed. The overall backlog goes back as far as 2016. It blames the delays on the closure of the workplace during COVID, lack of staff and the length of the process. At present any application has to go through six separate processes. It must be borne in mind that every delay has a negative impact on people's lives, increases their vulnerability, and heightens the uncertainty in their circumstances.

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/motsoaledi-pandemic-caused-40-365-visa-backlog-crisis-521f9d2a-0239-4396-abad-73bc9964847d>

A senior official of DHA put the backlog in applications for permanent residence at around 49 000. He also indicated that in 2022 there had been 97 000 applications for temporary residence and 20 000 for permanent residence. The rejection rate was around 45%. He conceded that the suspension of corrupt officials played some part in worsening the delays, and pledged to have the backlog resolved by June 2024.

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/dha-official-presents-higher-visa-backlog-than-motsoaledi-initially-reported-due-to-corruption-567fd7b6-d481-4545-a60e-2c41973778ba>

<https://www.ibn.co.za/blog-and-news/south-africa-visa-backlog-continues/>

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/dha-official-presents-higher-visa-backlog-than-motsoaledi-initially-reported-due-to-corruption-567fd7b6-d481-4545-a60e-2c41973778ba>

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2023-03-14-home-affairs-commits-to-reducing-permits-backlog/>

Over the past days the DHA has announced a blanket extension of all visa and waiver applications, around 56 000, until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-03-29-home-affairs-extends-concession-for-56000-foreigners/>

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2023-03-29-home-affairs-grants-relief-to-visa-applicants-due-to-backlog/>

These delays particularly impact the already vulnerable foreign nationals, including members of the mobile community. They also undermine economic recovery and leave several areas of industry without necessary skills. In a recent comment, Busi Mavuso the CEO of Business Leadership SA, spoke of the chaos these delays are causing in business.

<https://businesstech.co.za/news/business-opinion/677427/visa-chaos-in-south-africa/>

In the area of refugees and migrants in particular, there have recently been complaints that the mechanisms set up in 2021 to streamline services to those communities, and to avoid the corruption embedded in the physical process, are not fit for purpose, appear to be arbitrary in their responses, and are often out of service. This is coupled with complaints about poor service at offices and the corrupt activities of officials.

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2023-03-27-terrible-tech-and-sas-rotten-officials-make-life-even-harder-for-refugees/>

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/former-free-state-home-affairs-official-sentenced-five-years-for-soliciting-bribe-from-asylum-seeker-20230324>

NGOs and activist groups have responded to these pathologies in various ways including, recently, the establishment of a hotline.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-03-22-immigration-activists-launch-detention-hotline-as-calls-for-help-rise/>

As the failure of the DHA to bring certainty to the lives of tens of thousands of foreign nationals persists, the scourge of xenophobia continues to trouble the lives of foreign nationals. A collective of organisations working in the area of health and anti-xenophobia penned an open letter to the Minister of Health urging action in curbing the growth of xenophobia in the health sector.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-03-06-health-xenophobia-an-urgent-appeal-to-the-health-minister/>

Internationally, migrants are in a particularly precarious situation, as numbers are again on the increase and more stringent measures are being applied to halting the flow of migrants. In recent weeks the UK has been in the spotlight as Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has tabled policies designed to stop the attempts of migrants reaching the UK. It was one of the promises he made in his campaign for the premiership. France and the UK have entered into special agreements to prevent migrants from crossing the Channel, but many voices have warned that aspects of the policies come close to transgressing international law. Some organisations have pointed to the failure of similar policies in other countries.

<https://www.vox.com/2023/3/11/23634575/uk-immigration-bill-braverman-sunak-boats-channel>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/uk-france-mend-ties-leaders-agree-to-prevent-migrants-from-crossing-english-channel>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/05/uk-government-complicit-asylum-seeker-hotel-attacks-say-unions>

On the US-Mexico border a fire broke out in a migrant detention centre, killing 38 people. One of the very disturbing aspects was the failure of guards to unlock rooms in which the migrants were locked.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-65088389>

<https://apnews.com/article/mexico-fire-migrant-facility-dead-eea0b6efafd77f9868ef27ed1cf572b3>

One of the signs of the times across the globe is the ever increasing hostility towards mobile people, and in many places the active demonising of foreigners, which increases the vulnerability of those who have had to leave their homes and find new places in which to nurture a more meaningful life. This seems increasingly difficult everywhere.

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